



SYNOD OF BISHOPS

Rome, 1985

Lineamenta

Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World Twenty Years after the Second Vatican Council

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INTRODUCTION

1. "*Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World, twenty years after the Second Vatican Council*": this is the theme which, having regard for the most urgent, current and universal pastoral problems, *the majority of the ecclesial Bodies consulted requested as the topic* for discussion and reflection at the next Synod of Bishops in the Autumn of 1986.

This very request in its concreteness and preciseness shows that the need for a greater understanding and evaluation of the place and the tasks of the laity in the Church and the world of today is one which is widespread and very much felt.

The Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, welcomed this request and during his meeting with the members of the Council of the General Secretariate of the Synod on May 19th, 1984 made the following observation: "It is not difficult to grasp the motives for such a convergence of opinion. In reality, the mission of the laity, as an integral part of the salvific mission of the entire People of God, is of fundamental importance for the life of the Church and for the service which the Church herself is called to render to the world of humanity and of temporal realities".¹

2. In accordance with the already proven praxis, the "*Lineamenta*", now being offered to the various local churches in preparation for the Synod Assembly, are in no way—nor do they pretend to be—a complete and organic treatment of the theme of the laity in the life and mission of the Church. Neither are they an outline or draft of a possible future synodal document.

¹ Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Allocutio ad Sodales Consilii Secretariae generalis Synodi Episcoporum*, die 19 Maii 1984: *AAS LXXVI* (1984), p. 784.

The "*Lineamenta*", while characterized by a certain logical order, only aim to offer a point of departure for further analysis, discussion and reflection on the laity, on the theoretical and practical aspects of the question, on the values and needs, difficulties and resources to which the subject of the laity gives rise in the everyday life, in the pastoral activity and in the theological reflection of the various local churches.

3. The very nature of the theme chosen, especially with regard to aspects of life experience, makes most suitable a large scale *consultation of the laity themselves* even during the preparatory phase of the Synod Assembly in the local churches. This is so, not only because the laity are those most directly involved in the theme, but even more so on account of the charism which the laity receive from the Holy Spirit for the exercise of their own apostolate.²

A timely, intelligently effected and as wide as possible consultation of the laity will be of invaluable help so that the Church, and especially the Pastors who animate and guide her, can know better the real situation concerning the consciousness which the laity today, twenty years after the Second Vatican Council, have of their insertion into and participation in the life and mission of the Church in the world and in history.

² Cfr. Conc. Oec. Vat. II Decr. de apostolatu laicorum *Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 3: AAS LVIII (1966), p. 839.

FIRST PART

A LOOK AT THE POST-CONCILIAR SITUATION

I. THE TEACHING OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL ON THE LAITY

4. The Second Vatican Council has given the Church a very rich doctrinal, spiritual and pastoral heritage on the subject of the laity. Its documents splendidly testify to the wide ranging and deep reflection of the Council Fathers on the nature, spiritual dignity, mission and responsibility of the laity in the Church and in the world.

Of particular interest are the following documents:

— the Constitution *Lumen gentium* develops its teaching on the laity in the ecclesiological context of the People of God: the laity, in fact, are “the faithful who by baptism are incorporated into Christ, are placed in the People of God, and in their own way share the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ, and to the best of their ability carry on the mission of the whole christian people in the Church and in the world ”;³

— the Decree *Apostolicam actuositatem* highlights among other things the active and responsible participation of the laity in the salvific mission of the Church as “special and indispensable” to them: “Indeed, the Church can never be without the lay apostolate; it is something that derives from the lay-person’s very vocation as a christian”;⁴

— the Decree *Ad gentes* underlines the importance and indeed the irreplaceability of the laity in the missionary activity of the Church:

³ Conc. Oec. Vat. II Const. Dogm. de Ecclesia *Lumen gentium*, n. 31: AAS LVII (1965), p. 37.

⁴ Conc. Oec. Vat. II Decr. de apostolatu laicorum *Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 1: AAS LVIII (1966), p. 837.

"The Church is not truly established and does not fully live, nor is a perfect sign of Christ unless there is a genuine laity existing and working alongside the hierarchy";⁵

— the Constitution *Gaudium et spes* portrays the involvement of the laity as a significant and decisive moment in the Church's relationship to the contemporary world.

5. The teaching of the Second Vatican Council has been taken up, continued and developed in the succeeding years by the Magisterium of the Church, both pontifical and episcopal.

On various occasions Paul VI and John Paul II have offered a rich teaching on the mission of the laity.

In particular the Conciliar doctrine on the laity, even if only in partial aspects, has been echoed, applied and deepened in the pastoral outlines of the various Synods of Bishops.

A simple enumeration of the arguments treated by the Synods readily demonstrates the continuing and significant presence of the theme of the laity. Thus we have the 1971 Synod which treated of "*Justice in the World*" and "*The Ministerial Priesthood*", which is distinct yet coordinated with the common priesthood. The 1974 Synod on "*Evangelization*" recognised and explicitly promoted the specific place and task of the laity: "Lay people, whose particular vocation places them in the midst of the world and in charge of the most varied temporal tasks, must for this very reason exercise a very special form of evangelization".⁶ While the 1977 Synod on "*Catechesis*" stimulated further appreciation of the laity, even more so did the Synod of 1980 in its presentation of the *Christian family* as the primary and basic form of "secular" vocation and mission in the Church. Finally, the 1983 Synod recognises and promotes the task of the laity in the work of *Christian reconciliation*, which finds expression not only within the ecclesial community but also within human society, for the overcoming of those tensions and divisions which afflict it.

Also the new *Code of Canon Law* is of major doctrinal and pastoral importance.

⁵ Conc. Oec. Vat. II Decr. de activitate missionali Ecclesiae *Ad gentes*, n. 21: AAS LVIII (1966), p. 972.

⁶ Pauli PP. VI Adhort. Ap. *Evangelii nuntiandi*, n. 70: AAS LXVIII (1976), p. 59.

II. NEW PROBLEMS

6. The Second Vatican Council, with its renewed vision of the Church and her salvific mission in the world, has opened up new and magnificent horizons for the laity and their involvement in the Christian community and in society.

Twenty years after the Council, the Church feels called to question herself on the situation which gradually developed both within her communities and in relation to a profound and rapidly changing world.

To know the fruits arising from the Council, to accept the challenges and new problems being continually thrown up by history, to decipher expectations and requests are the premises and conditions of the Church's not only being faithful to the teaching of the Council, but also of her making the extraordinary richness of this teaching bear fruit in relation to the "question" posed by today's history.

7. The Holy Spirit is "moving lay-people today to a deeper and deeper awareness of their responsibility and urging them on everywhere to the service of Christ and the Church".⁷ The presence and action of the Spirit in the laity can be seen from the fruits of spiritual and apostolic vitality which enrich the post-conciliar Church.

The Council promoted a more "incarnate" spiritual life in the everyday lives of the laity: "This lay spirituality will take its particular character from the circumstances of one's state in life (married and family life, celibacy, widowhood), from one's state of health and from one's professional and social activity".⁸ Thus the Council has renewed the apostolic and pastoral dynamism of the laity with the resultant blossoming of new groups, movements and associations aimed at ensuring a powerful and efficacious presence in the various structures of today's society and in the various areas of cultural development.

The very variety and vitality of these lay associations and groups, at times spontaneous and informal, require that pastors today be more sensitive to and capable of discerning and recognising the gifts of the Spirit: "(Priests) should be willing to listen to lay-people, give brotherly consideration to their wishes, and recognise their experience and com-

⁷ Conc. Oec. Vat. II Decr. de apostolatu laicorum *Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 1: AAS LVIII (1966), p. 838.

⁸ *Ibidem*, n. 4: l. c., p. 841.

petence in the different fields of human activity. In this way they will be able to recognise along with them the signs of the times. While discerning the spirits to see if they be of God, priests must discover with faith, recognise with joy, and foster with diligence the many and varied charismatic gifts of the laity, whether these be of a humble or more exalted kind".⁹ On the other hand this growth of lay groups at times gave rise to new problems; for example, the problem of the "ecclesiality" of the laity (to what extent, and especially with regard to their temporal activity, can the laity be considered as authentic expressions of the Church); the problem of the laity's "connection" and "cooperation" with the common building up of the one Body which is the Church of Christ.

8. The Council teaching has clearly and vigorously re-presented the ecclesial nature and role of the laity. From this has come the development of a greater awareness of belonging to the Church and participation in her salvific mission. "Every lay person, through those gifts given them, is at once the witness and the living instrument of the mission of the Church itself 'according to the measure of Christ's bestowal' (*Eph* 4:7)".¹⁰

The same Council notes: "Besides this apostolate which belongs to absolutely every christian, the laity can be called in different ways to more immediate cooperation in the apostolate of the hierarchy, like those men and women who helped the apostle Paul in the Gospel, labouring much in the Lord (cf. *Phil* 4:3; *Rom* 16:3 ff.). They have, moreover, the capacity of being appointed by the hierarchy to some ecclesiastical offices with a view to a spiritual end".¹¹

In accordance with and as a development of these conciliar indications there arose in many of the laity the "demand" for participation in the pastoral activities of the Church. This participation took various forms, as for example the so-called "pastoral councils".

Noteworthy also is the far more extensive and stronger request, on the part of some of the laity, for access to various "ecclesial ministries". Thus there arose new problems, problems which require spiritual and

⁹ Conc. Oec. Vat. II Decr. de Presbyterorum ministerio et vita *Presbyterorum ordinis*, n. 9: AAS LVIII (1966), p. 1006.

¹⁰ Conc. Oec. Vat. II Const. Dogm. de Ecclesia *Lumen gentium*, n. 33: AAS LVII (1965), p. 39.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

pastoral discernment capable of taking up, confirming and developing the intrinsic values, while at the same time being able to single out and remove the dangers involved in the recent experiences of lay participation in the ministries of the Church. In reality, in certain situations in some local churches there exists the tendency to restrict apostolic activity to ecclesial "ministries" only, while interpreting them according to a "clerical image". This can involve the danger of confusion in the correct relationship which must exist between clergy and laity in the Church. It can also lead to an impoverishment of the salvific mission of the Church herself, called as she is—in a special way by means of the laity—to carry out this mission "in" and "for" the world of temporal and earthly realities: "The primary and immediate task (of the laity) is not to establish and develop the ecclesial community—this is the specific role of the pastors—but to put to use every christian and evangelical possibility latent but already present and active in the affairs of the world".¹²

9. At the same time the Second Vatican Council has given a theological outline of the secular condition of the laity, interpreting it in the context of a true and proper christian vocation: "By reason of their special vocation it belongs to the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will. They live in the world ...".¹³

Within the context of the specifically secular vocation and mission of the laity one must note on the one hand the numerous positive and consoling fruits while on the other certain phenomena which require critical evaluation. Among the former is the commitment of many of the laity in the area of human development, in the defence and development of the rights of each and every human being. The laity in the past have welcomed and continue to embrace the invitation of the Council: "By their competence in secular disciplines and by their activity, interiorly raised up by grace, let them work earnestly in order that created goods through human labour, technical skill and civil culture may serve the utility of all people according to the plan of the creator and the light of his word. May these goods be more suitably

¹² Pauli PP. VI Adhort. Ap. *Evangelii nuntiandi*, n. 70: AAS LXVIII (1976), pp. 59-60.

¹³ Conc. Oec. Vat. II Const. Dogm. de *Ecclesia Lumen gentium*, n. 31: AAS LVII (1965), p. 37.

distributed among all people and in their own way may they be conducive to universal progress in human and christian liberty".¹⁴

Among those tendencies which are problematical, two are worthy of note:

— The first tendency concerns those lay-people who are involved with temporal and earthly affairs. They are so influenced by secularization as to refuse, or at least compromise, that fundamental and unre-nouncable link with the faith, which alone is capable of generating and supporting that "christian animation" which must make alive the activity of the laity in the temporal order.

There is no scarcity of forms of collaboration in the economic, social, political and cultural area in which the Christian laity renounce their "identity" by adopting criteria and methods which the faith does not share: in these and similar cases "secularity" becomes "secularism", which is a radical contradiction of the true secular vocation of the Christian laity.

— The second tendency may be described as "flight from the world": not that flight of the monks—which always took place in the history of the Church—but rather the flight from the world on the part of those lay-people who live in the world in the midst of secular affairs and who "are called by God to make of their apostolate, through the vigor of their Christian spirit, a leaven in the world".¹⁵

The danger is evident: a problem of such singular importance today as the relationship between the Church and the world, between evangelization and history, runs the risk of not receiving an adequate response precisely because of this negative flight from the world.

In regard to these tendencies the attempts at "the clericalization of the laity" or "the laicization of the clergy" pointed out by Pope John Paul II are worthy of consideration.¹⁶

10. These and other phenomena derive from that interpretation given to the vocation and mission of the laity in the Church and in the world

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, n. 36: *l. c.*, pp. 41-42.

¹⁵ Conc. Oec. Vat. II Decr. de apostolatu laicorum *Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 2: AAS LVIII (1966), p. 839.

¹⁶ Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Allocutio ad Episcopos helvetios*, die 15 iunii 1984: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, VII, 1 (1984), p. 1784.

presented by the Second Vatican Council. If the interpretation is inadequate or indeed falsified, it is inevitable that the vocation and mission of the laity cannot be truly lived out, with the result that harm is done not only to individuals or groups but also to the entire ecclesial community. The latter's credibility is compromised and still more its pastoral efficacy is limited.

In that sense the doctrine of the Council on the participation of the laity in the mission of the Church, considered in its totality and in the unity of pastor-parishoner, requires that it be reflected upon afresh by all.

III. MEANING AND NECESSITY OF THE 1986 SYNOD

11. The ecclesial situation of today and the historical condition of society calls for a fresh look at the "figure" of the lay person, not just by the laity themselves but by all the Church.

This was expressed by the Holy Father in his meeting with the members of the Council of the General Secretariate of the Synod: "Twenty years after the conclusion of the conciliar assembly, it has not all faded. On the contrary, the necessity for a resumption of the Church's reflection on the vocation and the mission of the laity in the context of the plan of salvation which God in Jesus Christ fulfills in history is made greater and more urgent. Among other considerations, two in particular dominate in stressing the relevance and urgency of a further examination of the conciliar doctrine on the laity.

The first is of a more intraecclesial nature: we must ask about the numerous and precious fruits that the Second Vatican Council has produced by urging the laity to develop a keener awareness of their essential belonging in the Church and of their responsible participation in its mission of salvation. This will allow them to be more effectively committed so that these fruits may come not only from an elite, but also from the widespread masses of the laity themselves.

The second consideration is linked especially to the secular nature and task of the laity. In a privileged way Christian responsibility is addressed to a world in which there is rapid evolution and where our day presents a series of new, complex and at times even dramatic issues. How can we not emphasise yet again the persistent danger of

a scientific and technical development which is not sufficiently rooted in that full human inspiration, of which also the ethical and religious dimensions are a part?

Precisely this world, precisely this culture expect and require the competent, generous, resolute and Christian-inspired intervention of the laity, who only under this condition will be able to feel they are faithful to the task assigned to them by Jesus Christ, the task of being the salt of the earth and the leaven of the world. In the current state of the world, it is up to them to promote the indispensable alliance between science and wisdom, between technology and ethics, between history and faith, so that God's plan can be progressively carried out and with it man's true good can be achieved".¹⁷

If one wishes to point out some important areas in need of the work of Christian animation on the part of the laity, we can mention: work itself,¹⁸ education, the family, ¹⁹ politics, the economy, culture, "mass media". The area of youth is worthy of particular attention. Indeed, we can say that wherever people live and work *there* is to be found that potential area which often unknowingly awaits the kingdom of God, which is brought about thanks also to the work of the laity who believe in Christ.

The forthcoming Synod of Bishops is called upon, providentially and with adequate preparation, to become a "place"—primarily a spiritual "place" and more than just a material "place"—of encounter and dialogue:

— to clarify and deepen the understanding of the "figure", vocation and mission of the laity;

— to respond, in communion with the whole Church, to the pastoral problems which in our day are connected with the involvement of the laity in the ecclesial community and in civil society;

— to foster and promote in all the laity their spiritual and apostolic vitality in the service of the Church in this moment in history.

¹⁷ Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Allocutio ad Sodales Consilii Secretariae generalis Synodi Episcoporum*, die 19 Maii 1984: AAS LXXVI (1984), p. 785.

¹⁸ Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II Litt. Enc. *Laborem exercens*: AAS LXXIII (1981), pp. 577-647.

¹⁹ Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II Adhort. Ap. *Familiaris consortio*: AAS LXXIV (1982), pp. 81-191.

QUESTIONS ON THE FIRST PART

1. *Has the teaching of the Second Vatican Council concerning the place and task of the laity in the Church and in the world been welcomed, understood and properly presented in the local churches, with particular reference to the laity themselves? What concrete initiatives have been undertaken to achieve this goal?*
2. *Twenty years after the Council, in your particular churches, what are the positive fruits derived from the Council and what are the new problems that the laity must face in relation to their vocation and mission?*
3. *In this period and on the basis of the fullest understanding of God's plan that the whole Church be the "universal sacrament of salvation", how has the consciousness of the necessity and irreplaceability of the pastoral mission of the laity matured? Or has this maturity been based on contingent factors such as, for example, the scarcity of priests?*
4. *Has the conciliar interpretation of the figure of the lay-person been faithfully presented in your communities or has it undergone substantial modifications in the years succeeding the Council?*
5. *Is the consciousness that the laity belong to the Church and participate in her mission of salvation developed only among lay-groups, movements and associations or is it present in all the laity? Is it only an "elitist" consciousness or a truly "popular" one?*
6. *Has the awareness that "in the Church there is diversity of ministry but a unity of mission"²⁰ helped both the pastors and the laity to put into effect that "familiar relationship" of which the Council repeatedly speaks?²¹*

²⁰ Conc. Oec. Vat. II Decr. de apostolatu laicorum *Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 2: AAS LVIII (1966), p. 838.

²¹ Cfr. Conc. Oec. Vat. II Const. Dogm. de Ecclesia *Lumen gentium*, n. 37: AAS LVII (1965), pp. 42-43.

SECOND PART
IN THE CHURCH FOR THE WORLD:
THE VOCATION AND MISSION OF THE LAITY

I. THE CHURCH: UNIVERSAL SACRAMENT OF SALVATION

13. The history of humanity, in all times and places, reveals the fulness of its "truth" only in the light of faith: the world and people in the world are the goal of God's eternal plan, who out of love creates and saves.

"This plan—we read in the Second Vatican Council decree *Ad gentes*—flows from 'fountain-like love', the love of God the Father. As the principle without principle from whom the Son is generated and from whom the Holy Spirit proceeds through the Son, God in his great and merciful kindness freely creates us and moreover, graciously calls us to share in his life and glory. He generously pours out, and never ceases to pour out, his divine goodness, so that he who is creator of all things might at last become all in all (1 Cor 15:28), thus simultaneously assuring his own glory and our happiness. It pleased God to call men and women to share in his life and not merely singly, without any bond between them, but he formed them into a people, in which his children who had been scattered were gathered together".²²

14. The divine plan, which has at its centre Christ crucified and risen, understands his "Body", the Church, as a living sign and efficacious instrument of the love of God for humanity and the world.

The Church is the universal sacrament of salvation,²³ she is the People of God who welcome the gift of salvation and at the same time

²² Conc. Oec. Vat. II Decr. de activitate missionali Ecclesiae *Ad gentes*, n. 2: AAS LVIII (1966), p. 948.

²³ Cfr. Conc. Oec. Vat. II Const. Dogm. de Ecclesia *Lumen gentium*, n. 48: AAS LVII (1965), pp. 53-54.

it is the People of God who proclaim, announce and communicate the gift of salvation to people in every age. At one and the same time she is the "saved" community and the "saving" community.

She is the "word of grace" which unceasingly resounds in history edifying and building up the community of believers: "God, who spoke in the past, continues to converse with the spouse of his beloved Son. And the Holy Spirit, through whom the living voice of the Gospel rings out in the Church—and through her in the world—leads believers to the full truth, and makes the Word of Christ dwell in them in all its richness (cf. *Col* 3:16)".²⁴

II. THE PEOPLE OF GOD, A PEOPLE BAPTIZED

15. Through Baptism and the other sacraments, man and woman become part in a vital way of the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ crucified and risen, thereby becoming members of the People of God, which is the Church: "In the human nature united to himself, the Son of God, by overcoming death through his own death and resurrection, redeemed humanity and changed it into a new creation (cf. *Gal* 6:15; *2 Cor* 5:17). For by communicating his Spirit, Christ mystically constitutes as his body those brothers and sisters of his who are called together from every nation. In that body the life of Christ is communicated to those who believe and who, through the sacraments, are united in a hidden and real way to Christ in his passion and glorification. Through baptism we are formed in the likeness of Christ: 'For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body' (*1 Cor* 12:13). In this sacred rite fellowship in Christ's death and resurrection is symbolized and is brought about: 'For we were buried with him by means of baptism into death'; and if 'we have been united with him in the likeness of his death we shall be so in the likeness of his resurrection also' (*Rom* 6:4-5). Really sharing in the body of the Lord in the breaking of the eucharistic bread, we are taken up into communion with him and with one another. 'Because the bread is one, we, though many, are one body, all of us

²⁴ Conc. Oec. Vat. II Const. Dogm. de Divina Revelatione *Dei verbum*, n. 8: AAS LVIII (1966), p. 821.

who partake of the one bread' (1 Cor 10:17). In this way all of us are made members of his body (cf. 1 Cor 12:27), 'but severally members one of another' (Rom 12:5)".²⁵

16. The *baptismal condition* is common to all members of the People of God and forms the *very root of the christian vocation and dignity* of each and everyone: "There is, therefore, one chosen People of God: 'one Lord, one faith, one baptism' (Ephs 4:5); there is a common dignity of members deriving from their rebirth in Christ, a common grace as children, a common vocation to perfection, one salvation, one hope and undivided charity. In Christ and in the Church there is, then, no inequality arising from race or nationality, social condition or sex, for 'there is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor freeman; there is neither male nor female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Gal 3:28; cf. Col 3:11)".²⁶

Just as baptism forms the basis of the common vocation and christian dignity, so also it lies at the origin of the *common mission* entrusted to each and every baptised person in the Church and in the world: becoming part of the one body of Christ forms the basis which makes possible and responsibly demands of each and every baptised person, participation in the salvific mission of the Church in history: "In the organism of a living body no member plays a purely passive part; sharing in the life of the body it shares at the same time in its activity. The same is true for the Body of Christ, the Church: 'the whole Body achieves full growth in dependence on the full functioning of each part' (Ephs 4:16). Between the members of this body there exists, further, such a unity and solidarity (cf. Ephs 4:16) that a member who does not work for the growth of the body must be found wanting both to the Church and to self".²⁷

In particular: "from the fact of their union with Christ, the head, flows the lay-person's right and duty to be apostles. Inserted as they are into the Mystical Body of Christ by baptism and strengthened by

²⁵ Conc. Oec. Vat. II Const. Dogm. de Ecclesia *Lumen gentium*, n. 7: AAS LVII (1965), pp. 9-10.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, n. 32: *l. c.*, p. 38.

²⁷ Conc. Oec. Vat. II Decr. de apostolatu laicorum *Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 2: AAS LVIII (1966), p. 838.

the power of the Holy Spirit in confirmation, it is by the Lord himself that they are assigned to the apostolate. If they are consecrated a kingly priesthood and a holy nation (cf. *1 Pet* 2:4-10), it is in order that they may in all their actions offer spiritual sacrifices and bear witness to Christ throughout the world. Charity, which is, as it were, the soul of the whole apostolate, is given to them and nourished in them by the sacraments, the Eucharist above all. ...

The Holy Spirit sanctifies the People of God through the ministry and the sacraments. However, for the exercise of the apostolate he gives the faithful special gifts besides (cf. *1 Cor* 12:7), 'allotting them to each one as he wills' (*1 Cor* 12:11), so that each and all, putting at the service of others the grace received may be 'as good stewards of God's varied gifts' (*1 Pet* 4:10), for the building up of the whole body in charity (cf. *Ephs* 4:16)".²⁸

III. COMMON PRIESTHOOD AND MINISTERIAL PRIESTHOOD

18. As a people that welcomes and proclaims God's gift of salvation in Jesus Christ, the Church is a priestly people.

New Testament revelation presents the priesthood of the People of God—the *common priesthood*—prior to being considered a "ministry" to others, as a situation or "*condition*" of election, consecration and grace, which is proper to all who are baptised.

The Second Vatican Council, in presenting a synthesis of the biblical teaching writes: "Christ the Lord, high priest taken from among men (cf. *Heb* 5:1-5), made the new people 'a kingdom of priests to God, his Father' (*Apoc* 1:6; cf. 5:9-10). The baptised, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated to be a spiritual house and a holy priesthood, that through all the work of christians they may offer spiritual sacrifices and proclaim the perfection of him who has called them out of darkness into his marvellous light (cf. *1 Pet* 2:4-10). Therefore all the disciples of Christ, persevering in prayer and praising God (cf. *Acts* 2:42-47), should present themselves as a sacrifice, living, holy and pleasing to God (cf. *Rom* 12:1). They should everywhere on earth bear witness to Christ and give an answer

²⁸ *Ibidem*, n. 3: l. c., p. 839.

to everyone who asks a reason for the hope of an eternal life which is theirs (cf. 1 Pet 3:15).²⁹

The offering of spiritual sacrifices to God in the common confession of faith and those works in which faith acts in love³⁰ under the impulse of the Holy Spirit, cannot, however, be separated from the "mission": the priestly people are also a "missionary" people.³¹ In fact, baptism forms the believer in Jesus Christ who came not to be served but to serve³² and, therefore, places the baptized person in a state of "service".

19. Within this priestly people and in service to it the Lord Jesus established the ministerial priesthood, or rather a special participation in his priesthood, given to the baptized in the sacrament of Orders. This ministerial priesthood is ordered to the common priesthood even though it differs essentially, and not just in degree, from the latter.³³

"However, the Lord also appointed certain people as ministers, in order that they might be united in one body in which 'all the members have not the same function' (Rom 12:4). These were to hold in the community of the faithful the sacred power of Orders, that of offering sacrifice and forgiving sins, and were to exercise the priestly office publicly on behalf of others in the name of Christ ...

Because it is joined with the episcopal order the office of priests shares in the authority by which Christ himself builds up and sanctifies and rules his Body. Hence the priesthood of priests, while presupposing the sacraments of initiation, is nevertheless conferred by its own particular sacrament. Through that sacrament priests by the anointing of the Holy Spirit are signed with a special character and so are configured to Christ the priest in such a way that they are able to act in the person of Christ the head".³⁴

²⁹ Conc. Oec. Vat. II Const. Dogm. de Ecclesia *Lumen gentium*, n. 10: AAS LVII (1965), p. 14.

³⁰ Cfr. *Gal* 5, 6.

³¹ Cfr. 1 *Pe* 2, 4-10.

³² Cfr. *Mc* 10, 45.

³³ Cfr. Conc. Oec. Vat. II Const. Dogm. de Ecclesia *Lumen gentium*, n. 10: AAS LVII (1965), pp. 14-15.

³⁴ Conc. Oec. Vat. II Decr. de Presbyterorum ministerio et vita *Presbyterorum ordinis*, n. 2: AAS LVIII (1966), p. 992.

IV. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF EVERY CHRISTIAN IN THE COMMUNION OF THE CHURCH

20. Becoming a member of the priestly and missionary people by means of baptism, along with the other sacraments and gifts, every Christian is called actively and responsibly to participate in the unique salvific mission of the Church. Consequently every Christian is called to live concretely this Christian "service", in accordance with the diversity of the charisms and the specific nature of the vocation which the Holy Spirit gives to each one: "It is not only through the sacraments and the ministrations of the Church that the Holy Spirit makes holy the People, leads them and enriches them with his virtues. Allotting his gifts according as he wills (cf. 1 Cor 12:11), he also distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts he makes them fit and ready to undertake various tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the Church, as it is written: 'the manifestation of the Spirit is given to everyone for profit' (1 Cor 12:7)".³⁵

"In the Church there is *diversity of ministry but unity of mission*".³⁶ This is the repeatedly clear teaching of the apostle Paul, who in his pastoral recommendations to the Christian communities invites them to have regard for both the diversity and variety of the gifts, as well as for their mutual coordination and collaboration in the building up of the one Body of the Lord.³⁷

21. The responsibility of every Christian cannot but express itself *in intimate and living communion with the whole Church*, so wonderfully enriched by variety and the call to unity: "For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually members one of another" (Rom 12:4-5).

In faithfulness to the Church of Christ, there is need, therefore, for a constant growing communion between all the members of the People of God, *between the faithful and the Pastors*, as is repeatedly

³⁵ Conc. Oec. Vat. II Const. Dogm. de Ecclesia *Lumen gentium*, n. 12: AAS LVII (1965), p. 16.

³⁶ Conc. Oec. Vat. II Decr. de apostolatu laicorum *Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 2: AAS LVIII (1966), p. 838.

³⁷ Cfr. 1 Cor 12.

stated by the Second Vatican Council: "Although by Christ's will some are established as teachers, dispensers of the mysteries and pastors for the others, there remains, nevertheless, a true equality between all with regard to the dignity and to the activity which is common to all the faithful in the building up of the Body of Christ. The distinction which the Lord has made between the sacred ministers and the rest of the People of God involves union, for the pastors and the other faithful are joined together by a close relationship; the pastors of the Church, following the example of the Lord, should minister to each other and to the rest of the faithful; the latter should eagerly collaborate with the pastors and the teachers. And so amid variety all will bear witness to the wonderful unity in the Body of Christ: this very diversity of graces, of ministries and of works gathers the sons of God into one, for 'all these things are the work of the one and the same Spirit' (1 Cor 12:11)".³⁸

V. THE SECULAR VOCATION OF THE LAITY

22. According to the Second Vatican Council the *ecclesial condition of the laity* is *inseparably* defined in relation to their *baptismal* state and to their *secular* state.

Because of their baptism, the laity are incorporated into Christ and the Church: "The term 'laity' is here understood to mean all the faithful except those in Holy Orders and those who belong to a religious state approved by the Church. That is, the faithful who by Baptism are incorporated into Christ, are placed in the People of God, and in their own way share the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ, and to the best of their ability carry on the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world".³⁹

On the other hand, the same Council presents the participation of the laity in temporal and worldly affairs, that is their "secularity", not only as a sociological datum, but also and specifically as a theological

³⁸ Conc. Oec. Vat. II Const. Dogm. de Ecclesia *Lumen gentium*, n. 32: AAS LVII (1965), p. 38; cfr. *ibidem*, n. 37: *l. c.*, pp. 42-43; cfr. Conc. Oec. Vat. II Decr. de apostolatu laicorum *Apostolicam actuositatem*, nn. 6 et 25: AAS LVIII (1966), pp. 842-843 et 857-858.

³⁹ Conc. Oec. Vat. II Const. Dogm. de Ecclesia *Lumen gentium*, n. 31: AAS LVII (1965), p. 37.

and ecclesial datum, as the characteristic form of living the Christian vocation: "Their secular character is proper and peculiar to the laity. ... By reason of their special vocation it belongs to the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will. They live in the world, that is, they are engaged in each and every work and business of the earth and in the ordinary circumstances of social and family life which, as it were, constitute their very existence. They are called by God, that being led by the spirit of the Gospel, they may contribute to the sanctification of the world, as from within like leaven, by fulfilling their own particular duties. Thus, especially by the witness of their life, resplendent in faith, hope and charity they must manifest Christ to others".⁴⁰

The laity possess a *unique and undivided "identity"*, in that *at one and the same time* they are members of the Church and members of society.

23. The laity consistently derive their participation in the salvific mission of the Church from their typical ecclesial condition: because they are baptized, and therefore members of Christ and his Church, the laity can and must live their apostolic responsibility, not only in the midst of temporal and worldly affairs, but also in those things that are properly ecclesial. On the basis of their specific secular condition, the laity are enabled and involved as Christians not only in the sphere of the Church but also and properly in the world and its structures and realities.

In an enlightening text the Second Vatican Council affirms: "The work of Christ's redemption concerns essentially the salvation of humanity; it takes in also, however, the renewal of the whole temporal order. The mission of the Church, consequently, is not only to bring people the message and grace of Christ but also to permeate and improve the whole range of the temporal order. The laity, carrying out this mission of the Church, exercise their apostolate, therefore, in the world as well as in the Church, in the temporal order as well as in the spiritual. These orders are distinct; they are nevertheless so closely linked that God's plan is, in Christ, to take the whole world up again and make of it a new creation, in an initial way here on earth, in full realization at

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*: l. c., pp. 37-38.

the end of time. The lay-person, at one and the same time a believer and a citizen of the world, has only a single conscience, a Christian conscience; it is by this that he must be guided continually in both domains".⁴¹

24. In the salvific mission which the Church has towards the temporal and earthly order—a mission belonging to the whole Church and, therefore, also to pastors⁴²—the laity, in virtue of their typical secularity, have an original and irreplaceable position: "The laity ought to take on themselves as their distinctive task this renewal of the temporal order. Guided by the light of the Gospel and the mind of the Church, prompted by Christian love, they should act in this domain in a direct way and in their own specific manner. As citizens among citizens they must bring to their cooperation with others their own special competence, and act on their own responsibility; everywhere and always they have to seek the justice of the kingdom of God".⁴³

Paul VI in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, wrote concerning the laity: "Their own field of evangelizing activity is the vast and complicated world of politics, society and economics, but also the world of culture, of the sciences and the arts, of international life, of the mass media. It also includes other realities which are open to evangelization, such as human love, the family, the education of children and adolescents, professional work, suffering. The more Gospel-inspired lay people there are engaged in these realities, clearly involved in them, competent to promote them and conscious that they must exercise to the full their christian powers which are often buried and suffocated, the more these realities will be at the service of the kingdom of God and therefore of salvation in Jesus Christ, without in any way losing or sacrificing their human content but rather pointing to a transcendent dimension which is often disregarded".⁴⁴

The presence of the Christian laity in the world must be courageous and prophetic, capable of taking on various forms of witness ac-

⁴¹ Conc. Oec. Vat. II Decr. de apostolatu laicorum *Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 5: AAS LVIII (1966), p. 842.

⁴² Cfr. *ibidem*, n. 7: *l. c.*, pp. 843-844.

⁴³ *Ibidem*: *l. c.*, p. 844.

⁴⁴ Pauli PP. VI Adhort. Ap. *Evangelii nuntiandi*, n. 70: AAS LXVIII (1976), p. 60.

accompanied by a discernment that is always evangelical and at times critical. Indeed, as Saint John and Saint Paul note, the world is a reality where good and evil coexist requiring discernment and free choice.

VI. THE MINISTRIES ENTRUSTED TO THE LAITY

"The Lord Jesus, 'whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world' (Jn 10:36) makes his Mystical Body sharer in the anointing of the Spirit wherewith he has been anointed: for in that Body all the faithful are made a holy and kingly priesthood, they offer spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ, and they proclaim the virtues of him who has called them out of darkness into his wonderful light. Therefore there is no such thing as a member that has not a share in the mission of the entire Body. Rather, every single member ought to reverence Jesus in his heart and by the spirit of prophecy give testimony to Jesus".⁴⁵

The responsibility of one and all must therefore be recognised and promoted within and for the People of God, as well as that of the lay faithful.

While all vocations within the Church stand in need of recognition and promotion, not all, however, have need of *official institutional* recognition and promotion on the part of the hierarchy.

On the other hand, as history shows, the Church has always recognised and instituted different forms of "ministry" among the laity. The Second Vatican Council, even if in general terms and in the context of the participation of the laity in the salvific mission of the Church, asserts: "(The laity) have, moreover, the capacity of being appointed by the hierarchy to some ecclesiastical offices with a view to a spiritual end".⁴⁶

In the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* Paul VI, after pointing out the importance of the active presence of the laity in the temporal order, wrote: "One cannot, however, neglect or forget the other dimension: the laity can also feel themselves called, or be called,

⁴⁵ Conc. Oec. Vat. II Decr. de Presbyterorum ministerio et vita *Presbyterorum ordinis*, n. 2: AAS LVIII (1966), pp. 991-992.

⁴⁶ Conc. Oec. Vat. II Const. Dogm. de Ecclesia *Lumen gentium*, n. 33: AAS LVII (1965), p. 39.

to work with their pastors in the service of the ecclesial community, for its growth and life, by exercising a great variety of ministries according to the grace and charisms which the Lord is pleased to give them. ... It is certain that side-by-side with the ordained ministries, whereby certain people are appointed pastors and consecrate themselves in a special way to the service of the community, the Church recognises the place of non-ordained ministries which are able to offer a particular service to the Church".⁴⁷

26. To define more precisely both the legitimacy and the concrete specification of the ministries entrusted to the laity, Paul VI called for a re-reading of Church history while paying particular attention to present needs: "A glance at the origins of the Church is very illuminating, and gives the benefit of an early experience in the matter of ministries. It was an experience which was all the more valuable in that it enabled the Church to consolidate herself and to grow and spread. Attention to the sources however has to be complemented by attention to the present needs of humanity and the Church. To drink at these ever inspiring sources without sacrificing anything of their values, and at the same time to know how to adapt oneself to the demands and needs of the day—these are the criteria which will make it possible to seek wisely and to discover the ministries which the Church needs and which many of her members will gladly embrace for the sake of ensuring greater vitality in the ecclesial community".⁴⁸

The experience which in recent years some local churches have passed through urges renewed reflection on the ministries entrusted to the laity. Such reflection cannot avoid considering attentively the true nature both of the ecclesial "ministry" in general, and, in particular, the ecclesial distinctiveness of the laity, especially their "secular" condition. It is necessary to bear in mind that the term "ministries" is sometimes used with a varying range of meaning.

⁴⁷ Pauli PP. VI Adhort. Ap. *Evangelii nuntiandi*, n. 73: AAS LXVIII (1976), pp. 61-62.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*: l. c., p. 62.

QUESTIONS ON THE SECOND PART

1. *What local baptismal consciousness is present among the various members of your local church?
Are Baptism and the other sacraments of christian initiation (Confirmation and the Eucharist) seen and lived as the foundation and dynamism of everyone's participation in the life and mission of the Church?*
2. *How is the difference between the common priesthood and the ministerial priesthood, between the mission of the laity and the mission of the pastors, as reaffirmed by the Second Vatican Council, understood, accepted and lived out at the level both of reflection and pastoral practice?*
3. *How is the secular character, described by the Council as "proper and particular to" the laity due to their participating in the salvific mission of the Church, perceived and lived out?
What pastoral problems are created by the concrete forms in which the Christian laity live out the Church-world relationship?*
4. *In your local church does the problem of ministries entrusted to the laity present itself?
If so, in what way and for what reasons?*

THIRD PART

WITNESSES OF CHRIST IN THE WORLD

I. CALLED AND SENT BY JESUS CHRIST

27. In order that their "mission" in the Church and in the world be fulfilled it is of fundamental importance that the laity be *conscious of the "vocation"* which the Lord Jesus by means of his Church extends to them so that they may take part in building up the kingdom of God in the world.

The Second Vatican Council expressed in real concrete terms the theme of the *apostolic vocation of the laity* towards the end of the decree *Apostolicam actuositatem*, where, among other things, we read: "It is the Lord himself, by this Council, who is once more inviting all the laity to unite themselves to him even more intimately, to consider his interests as their own (cf. *Phil* 2:5), and to join in his mission as Saviour. It is the Lord who is again sending them into every town and every place where he himself is to come (cf. *Lk* 10:1). He sends them on the Church's apostolate, an apostolate that is one, yet has different forms and methods, an apostolate that must all the time be adapting itself to the needs of the moment; he sends them on an apostolate where they are to show themselves his cooperators, doing their full share continually in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord their labour cannot be lost (cf. *1 Cor* 15:58)".⁴⁹

The vocation of the laity to the apostolate is rooted in the *Sacraments*, which form the believers in Jesus Christ, priest, prophet and king and enable them to share in the salvific mission of the Church. The sacramental gift then is accompanied by the *Christian virtues* (above all: faith, hope and charity) and by the *gifts of the Holy Spirit*,

⁴⁹ Conc. Oec. Vat. II Decr. de apostolatu laicorum *Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 33: AAS LVIII (1966), pp. 863-864.

which constitute a further appeal, both interior and living, to the apostolate in the Church.⁵⁰

It follows that the vocation to the apostolate is a constitutive and integrating part of the Christian vocation as such: it concerns, therefore, each and every Christian, even those not belonging to groups, movements, associations, communities, etc. No one is excluded and no one is dispensable. With regard to apostolic responsibility there is likewise expressed and confirmed the uniqueness and the unrepeatability of the person before God, the Church and history.

28. The apostolic vocation of the laity in regard to its actual working out is further refined, as far as particular content and modality is concerned, by that very *history* of which the laity themselves are part. The most varied circumstances of one's personal, family and social life as well as the most diverse historical, environmental and cultural situations are, in their own way, the historical putting into effect of the command of the Lord which, here and now, calls to the apostolate.

Consequently the laity must be able to read the "signs of the times" in order to decipher and receive the demands of God, who works in and through history, for the building up of His kingdom.

II. THE CONTENT OF THE MISSION OF THE LAITY

1. *Service to the Church*

29. The apostolic and pastoral mission of the laity derives its content from their being themselves members of the Church and members of society, from their baptismal and secular condition.

Belonging to the Church is the ground which qualifies and commits the laity to share, in ways specific to the call of each, the salvific mission of the Church, in that threefold and yet unique moment of the announcement of the Word, of the celebration of the sanctifying worship and the service of humanity in the charity of Jesus Christ.

One text, among the many, of the Second Vatican Council can guide us in pointing to the manifold activities which the laity can and must fulfill in the service of the Church: "Participators in the function of

⁵⁰ Cfr. *ibidem*, n. 3: *l. c.*, pp. 839-840.

Christ, priest, prophet and king, the laity have an active part of their own in the life and action of the Church. Their action within the Church communities is so necessary that without it the apostolate of the pastors will frequently be unable to obtain its full effect. Following in the footsteps of the men and women who assisted Paul in the proclamation of the Gospel (cf. *Acts* 18:18-26; *Rom* 16:3), lay persons of a genuinely apostolic spirit supply the needs of their brothers and sisters and are a source of consolation no less to the pastors than to the rest of the faithful (cf. *1 Cor* 16:17-18). Nourished by their active participation in the liturgical life of their community, they engage zealously in its apostolic works; they draw people towards the Church who had been perhaps very far away from it; they ardently cooperate in the spread of the Word of God, particularly by catechetical instruction; by their expert assistance they increase the efficacy of the care of souls as well as of the administration of the goods of the Church".⁵¹

2. *Service to humanity*

30. The Christian animation of the temporal order also forms part of the Church's mission: "It is the work of the entire Church to fashion men and women able to establish the proper scale of values on the temporal order and direct it towards God through Christ".⁵² "In pursuing its own salvific purpose not only does the Church communicate divine life to people, but in a certain sense it casts the reflected light of that divine life over all the earth, notably in the way it heals and elevates the dignity of the human person, in the way it consolidates society and endows people's daily activity with a deeper sense and meaning. The Church, then, believes it can contribute much to humanizing the human family and its history through each of its members and its community as a whole".⁵³

To the laity in particular falls the task of the christian animation of the temporal order. This is a many faceted and varied task, which finds its synthesis and meaning in the *service to people so that they be promoted in their integral truth*.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, n. 10: *I. c.*, p. 846.

⁵² *Ibidem*, n. 7: *I. c.*, p. 844.

⁵³ Conc. Oec. Vat. II Const. Past. de *Ecclesia Gaudium et spes*, n. 40: *AAS* LVIII (1966), p. 1058.

Making explicit in a logical order the extraordinary wealth of values and needs which profoundly characterize humanity, and therefore offering a global "picture" of the content of the mission of the laity, *four elements* present themselves as essential for the promotion of persons in accordance with their integral truth: their relationship with God, with self, with others and with things.

31. To serve persons means promoting them in their radical relationship with God, Creator and Father.

This service consists in helping people seek out, find and live their intrinsic religious dimension, preparing them to receive from God the gift of faith, which leads man and woman into that intimate communion of love and life with God.

Such help can take on various forms, such as:

— nourishing the desire and the natural need for God present in the heart of everyone, the living terminus of the love of God who creates and saves;

— professing and proclaiming in an explicit way faith in Jesus, the Son of God, crucified and risen and who is "the goal of human history, the focal point of the desires of history and civilization, the centre of mankind, the joy of all hearts and the fulfilment of all aspirations";⁵⁴

— fostering dialogue and encounter with God in prayer.

The task of the laity in its religious dimension forms part of this service so that, and especially in the context of social life and religious legislation, the right of the human person to *religious liberty* be respected, something clearly affirmed by the Council and repeatedly so by Pope John Paul II.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, n. 45: *l.c.*, p. 1066.

⁵⁵ Cfr. Conc. Oec. Vat. II Decl. de libertate religiosa *Dignitatis humanae*, n. 2: AAS LVIII (1966), pp. 930-931; Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Homilia*, in loco vulgo «Colle dei Martiri» dicto, in urbe «Otranto» habita, die 5 Octobris 1980: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, III, 2 (1980), pp. 773-781; Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Allocutio post manifestationem vulgo dictam «fiaccolata» in urbe «Lourdes» habita*, die 14 Augusti 1983: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, VI, 2 (1983), pp. 207-213.

32. To serve persons means to promote them in their relationship with themselves, in their inalienable personal dignity which derives from being created in the image and likeness of God and called to become sons of God in the Onlybegotten Son: the human person "is the only creature on earth that God has wanted for its own sake" and "who can fully discover its true self only in a sincere giving of itself".⁵⁶

To promote the human person therefore, means and requires the commitment of the laity so that:

- the personal dignity of each and everyone is respected, while paying particular attention to the various forms of marginalization;
- tendencies debasing human values and needs be overcome;
- every form of exploitation and all forms of slavery which violate personal dignity and regard people as "objects", be energetically fought against.

33. To serve persons means to promote them in their relationship with others, in their natural and social dimension.

The help which the laity can and must give in the social and political field is fundamental and entails a series of very broad and diversified tasks.

By way of example we can mention the following tasks:

- to ensure that interpersonal relations are inspired and guided by the moral criteria of that personal dignity proper to every human being and not rather following the criteria of efficiency, functionalism, etc.: "It is what one is, rather than what one has, that counts";⁵⁷
- to assist in the formation and development of the various human communities, beginning with the family and extending gradually through the larger groups and associations and finally to civil society;
- to educate for active and responsible participation in political life, both national and international.

⁵⁶ Conc. Oec. Vat. II Const. Past. de *Ecclesia Gaudium et spes*, n. 24: AAS LVIII (1966), p. 1045.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, n. 35: *l. c.*, p. 1053.

34. To serve persons means to promote them in their relationship with the material world, in fidelity to the task of responsible "dominion" received from God in the beginning.⁵⁸

This service is expressed and rendered in the possession, use, transformation and distribution of goods and resources in accordance with justice and charity.

In particular the most common and significant areas of testimony on the part of the laity will be:

- the area of work,⁵⁹
- the area of science and technology,
- the area of the specialised professions.

35. With this multiple and unitary service in the promotion of the person, the laity contribute towards the creation and development of an ever more human and humanizing "culture", which unceasingly draws from and is nourished by that "integral truth" about people, resplendent in the life of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh.⁶⁰

In this context the laity have a particular commitment in regard to the development and correct use of the means of *social communication*.

III. INDIVIDUAL AND ASSOCIATE APOSTOLATE

36. The laity can fulfill their mission in the Church and in the world either individually or united in communities or associations.

The *individual apostolate* is always necessary and sometimes the only one possible. The Second Vatican Council writes: "The apostolate to be exercised by the individual—which flows abundantly from a truly Christian life (cf. *Jn* 4:11)—is the starting point and condition of all types of lay apostolate, including the organized apostolate; nothing can replace it. The individual apostolate is everywhere and always valid; in certain circumstances it is the only one appropriate, the only

⁵⁸ Cfr. *Gn* 1, 27-28.

⁵⁹ Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II Litt. Enc. *Laborem exercens*: AAS LXXIII (1981), pp. 577-647.

⁶⁰ Cfr. *Io* 1, 14; Conc. Oec. Vat. II Const. Past. de Ecclesia *Gaudium et spes*, n. 22: AAS LVIII (1966), pp. 1042-1044.

one possible. Every lay-person, whatever their condition, is called to it, is obliged to it, even if they have not the opportunity of possibility of collaborating in associations".⁶¹

The individual apostolate springs from the fact that "every" lay-person has his or her "own" vocation and mission in the Church for the world: each one can discern this vocation in the light of the talents received, of the charisms possessed, in the concrete circumstances wherein one lives and works.

The individual apostolate, prior to expressing itself in specific works, is defined by the witness of a Christian life, a daily life inspired by the Gospel and which is the concrete expression of it: "For the Church, the first means of evangelization is the witness of an authentically Christian life, given over to God in a communion that nothing should destroy and at the same time given to ones neighbour with limitless zeal ... People today listen more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if they do listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses. Saint Peter expressed this well when he held up the example of a reverent and chaste life that wins over even without a word those who refuse to obey the word (cf. 1 Pet 3:1)".⁶²

37. The joint apostolate springs from various sources and responds to different demands: on the one hand it expresses the social nature of the person and in particular the participation of the Christian in the Church as "communion";⁶³ on the other hand it responds to the historical requirement for a vaster and more profound efficacy in the apostolic action of the laity: the "cultural" incidence, source and stimulus of every other transformation of the environment and of society, can express itself in the work, not so much of the individual as rather of a "social subject", of a group, movement, association, community.

In the end, the individual apostolate also always tends to create a fabric of Christian friendship and, therefore, to form communities.

The pastoral problems which the joint apostolate of the laity has given rise to in various local churches are multiple.

⁶¹ Conc. Oec. Vat. II Decr. de apostolatu laicorum *Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 16: AAS LVIII (1966), p. 851.

⁶² Pauli PP. VI Adhort. Ap. *Evangelii nuntiandi*, n. 41: AAS LXVIII (1976), p. 31.

⁶³ Cfr. Conc. Oec. Vat. II Decr. de apostolatu laicorum *Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 18: AAS LVIII (1966), pp. 852-853.

We recall some, by way of example:

— in some churches are to be found crises of associationism, at least traditional, and the simultaneous search for new and more meaningful forms of lay aggregation;

— the recognition of the right of the laity concerning associations: "While preserving intact the necessary link with ecclesiastical authority, the laity have the right to establish and direct associations, and to join existing ones";⁶⁴

— the legitimacy of a plurality of aggregations—groups, movements, lay-associations—deriving both from the *different understanding of the aim* and from the different methods adopted, as well as from the different vocations of the laity: "Great variety is to be found in apostolic associations. Some look to the general apostolic end of the Church; others aim specifically at evangelization and sanctification; others work for the permeation of the temporal order by the Christian spirit; and others engage in works of mercy and of charity as their special way of bearing witness to Christ";⁶⁵

— the need to promote a more vigorous "*co-responsibility of equality*" in the fulfilment of the apostolate of the laity, by means of reciprocal respect and mutual esteem and even more so by means of an interior *sensus Ecclesiae* which would bring each and every form of aggregation to love the Church over and above the association, movement or group to which they belong;

— the continual need to verify fidelity to the Church, of which it should be an expression;

— the discernment concerning the relevance of definite forms: "Dissipation of forces must, however, be avoided; this would happen if new associations and works were created without sufficient reason, if old ones now grown useless were held on to, if out-of-date methods continued to be employed. It will not always be a wise procedure, either, to transfer indiscriminately into some particular country forms that have arisen in another".⁶⁶

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, n. 19: l. c., p. 854; cfr. *Codex Iuris Canonici*, cann. 215 et 216.

⁶⁵ Conc. Oec. Vat. II Decr. de apostolatu laicorum *Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 19: AAS LVIII (1966), p. 853.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*: l. c., p. 854.

IV. ECCLESIAL CO-RESPONSIBILITY

38. In its intimate nature the mission of the laity is participation in the salvific mission of the Church in the world. For this reason, in its actual working out, it cannot but be in contact with the mission of the other members of the Church.⁶⁷

In this way the apostolate of the laity, deriving as it does from the unique mission of the Church and directed towards the building up of the one Body of Christ,⁶⁸ seeks to be in harmony with all the other ministries and services present and working in the People of God. It is the "*common participation*" in the ecclesial mission which at once enables and strives for continual growth towards a mature "*ecclesial co-responsibility*", from which there can develop a unified organic pastoral action.

Among the pastoral problems connected with ecclesial co-participation and co-responsibility, and worthy of note, are the relationships which the laity must live with different members of the same Church, especially:

— with the hierarchy, because "union with those whom the Holy Spirit has appointed to rule the Church of God (cf. *Acts* 20:28) is an essential element of the christian apostolate";⁶⁹

— more concretely, with the priests who guide and animate the individual Christian communities: "Priests are to be sincere in their appreciation and promotion of lay people's dignity and of the special role the laity have to play in the Church's mission. ... The faithful for their part ought to realize that they have obligations to their priests. They should treat them with filial love as being their fathers and pastors. They should also share their priests' anxieties and help them as far as possible by prayer and active work so that they may be better able to overcome difficulties and carry out their duties with greater success";⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Cfr. *ibidem*, n. 2: l. c., pp. 838-839.

⁶⁸ Cfr. *1 Cor* 12, 7.

⁶⁹ Conc. Oec. Vat. II Decr. de apostolatu laicorum *Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 23: AAS LVIII (1966), p. 836.

⁷⁰ Conc. Oec. Vat. II Decr. de Presbyterorum ministerio et vita *Presbyterorum ordinis*, n. 9: AAS LVIII (1966), pp. 1005-1006.

— with religious, welcoming their witness to eschatological values as a necessary evangelical element for living more authentically their existence in the temporal and worldly order.

The laity are called also to collaborate with non-Christians and non-believers, above all in initiatives directed to human development.

V. THE FORMATION OF THE LAITY

39. In order to mature in awareness of the lay "*identity*" and responsibly assume the lay "*mission*", an opportune and progressive formation is indispensable: "A training, at once many-sided and complete, is indispensable if the apostolate is to attain full efficacy. This is required, not only by the continuous spiritual and doctrinal progress of the lay-people themselves, but also by the variety of circumstances, persons and duties to which they should adapt their activity".¹

Besides, apostolic formation is an integrating and indistinguishable part of Christian formation as such, because: "the Christian vocation is, of its nature, a vocation to the apostolate as well".²

The principal aim of this general formation of the laity must be the maturation of responsible, and therefore moral, personal attitudes which correspond to the great truths of the Church, making them existentially concrete in individual and social life. In particular it is necessary to develop the awareness of belonging to God as the basic content of Christian freedom and the criteria for judging the events of the world and belonging to Christ in the Church. The model of this lived morality is Mary, who lives her liberty as total obedience to God and service to others.

40. *Content of the formation*: an adequate formation of the laity must find expression at various interconnected levels. Indeed, it must be a formation that is:

- human,
- doctrinal, that is: of faith,

¹ Conc. Oec. Vat. II Decr. de apostolatu laicorum *Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 28: AAS LVIII (1966), p. 859.

² *Ibidem*, n. 2: *l. c.*, p. 838.

- spiritual,
- social,
- apostolic.

41. *Places of education*: they are the same as for Christian education as such. Worthy of note in particular is the role of:

— the family, the domestic church: "The educational role of the Christian family has a very important place in organic pastoral work. This involves a new form of cooperation between parents and Christian communities, and between the various educational groups and pastors";⁷³

— the parish community and in it the priests: "Children must be trained to go beyond the confines of the family and to take an interest in both ecclesial and temporal communities. Their integration into the local parish community should succeed in bringing them the awareness of being living, active members of the People of God. Priests, for their part, should not lose sight of this question of training for the apostolate when catechizing, preaching and directing souls, and in other functions of the pastoral ministry";⁷⁴

— schools, colleges, educational institutes, apostolic groups, etc.;

— special institutes destined for the theoretical and practical formation and preparation to the lay apostolate, above all in specific fields of activity.

42. *Education as process*: as with any other educative work, so also the educative work of the apostolate of the laity must be timely, progressive and permanent. It must, therefore, accompany the lay-person in his growth, from childhood to adolescence, from youth to adulthood.

VI. LIFE ACCORDING TO THE SPIRIT

43. The fecundity of holy Mother Church is derived from and measured by that link of love which binds her to Jesus Christ, as his Bride: in such a sense "*spirituality*" represents the soul of the apostolate.

⁷³ Ioannis Pauli PP. II Adhort. Ap. *Familiaris consortio*, n. 40: AAS LXXIV (1982), p. 131.

⁷⁴ Conc. Oec. Vat. II Decr. de apostolatu laicorum *Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 30: AAS LVIII (1966), p. 861.

The same holds true also for the laity and their apostolate: "Christ, sent by the Father, is the source of the Church's whole apostolate. Clearly then, the fruitfulness of the apostolate of lay people depends on their living union with Christ; as the Lord himself said: 'Whoever dwells in me and I in him bears much fruit, for separated from me you can do nothing (Jn 15:4-5)'.⁷⁵

"*Spirituality*", understood as life according to the Spirit, is possible and required of every Christian, in that he or she is called to the perfection of love, something strongly reposed by the Second Vatican Council when speaking of the universal vocation to sanctity in the Church: "It is therefore quite clear that all Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fulness of Christian life and to the perfection of love".⁷⁶ On the other hand the same Council spoke of various forms of spirituality, in relation to states of life and different ministries: "The forms and tasks of life are many but holiness is one—that sanctity which is cultivated by all who act under God's Spirit and, obeying the Father's voice and adoring God the Father in spirit and in truth, follow Christ, poor, humble and cross-bearing, that they may deserve to be partakers of his glory. Each one, however, according to his own gifts and duties must steadfastly advance along the way of a living faith, which arouses hope and works through love".⁷⁷

It is legitimate, indeed necessary, that the lay faithful follow a specifically lay spirituality, certain characteristic aspects of which the Council pointed to.⁷⁸

44. The spirituality of the laity, because it is Christian spirituality, must nourish itself from those sources which are the word of God, the celebration of the sacraments, prayer, a life of charity. At the same time these sources will inspire a proper evangelical attitude in the fulfilment of the duties which the laity have in the world of the family and in the professional, social, political and cultural world. This spirituality, must nourish itself from those sources which are the word of

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, n. 4: *l. c.*, p. 840.

⁷⁶ Conc. Oec. Vat. II Const. Dogm. de Ecclesia *Lumen gentium*, n. 40: AAS LVII (1965), p. 45.

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, n. 41: *l. c.*, p. 45.

⁷⁸ Cfr. Conc. Oec. Vat. II Decr. de apostolatu laicorum *Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 4: AAS LVIII (1966), pp. 840-842.

God, the celebration of the sacraments, prayer, a life of charity. This spirituality can be integrated with the particular connotations belonging to the various sound forms of spirituality which flourish in the Church.

"This life of intimate union with Christ in the Church is maintained by the spiritual helps common to all the faithful, chiefly by active participation in the liturgy. Lay-people should make such a use of these helps that, while meeting their human obligations in the ordinary conditions of life, they do not separate their union with Christ from their ordinary life; but through the very performance of their tasks, which are God's will for them, actually promote the growth of their union with him. ... Family care should not be foreign to their spirituality, nor any other temporal interest; in the words of the apostle: 'Whatever you are doing, whether speaking or acting, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God the Father through him' (*Col 3:17*)".⁷⁹

45. Among the essential elements of lay spirituality the following should be noted:

— the laity do not flee from temporal and worldly realities in search of the Lord, but, fulfilling His will in the obligations of every day, they find the Lord, love him and make him loved;

— the laity live Christian hope in the world that passes: "Let them not hide this their hope then, in the depths of their hearts, but rather express it through the structure of their secular lives in continual conversion and in wrestling 'against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of iniquity' (*Ephs 6:12*)";⁸⁰

— the laity in their temporal and worldly activities are ever more inspired by faith and charity: by faith they will know how to discern the "signs" of the presence of God in history while by charity they will love every person with the same love which God manifested and communicated in Jesus Christ crucified and risen.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*: l. c., p. 840.

⁸⁰ Conc. Oec. Vat. II Const. Dogm. de Ecclesia *Lumen gentium*, n. 35: AAS LVII (1965), p. 40.

QUESTIONS ON THE THIRD PART

1. *In the lives of men and women today, and particularly in the context of your local church, what are the areas which call with greatest urgency for the involvement of the apostolate of the laity?*
2. *How is the wealth of the diverse forms of the lay apostolate utilized in your local church? How is this richness used to arouse a personal apostolic awareness in the individual faithful?*
3. *What problems are posed by the pluralism of forms of the lay apostolate? How can the activities of the laity be coordinated at parochial, diocesan, national and international level?*
4. *What fruits have been borne in your local church by the pastoral councils?*
5. *How can the laity be formed in their vocation and for their mission in the Church and in the world?*
6. *What elements need to be underlined as essential and significant in the spirituality that is proper to the laity?
What stimuli can be derived from the spirituality of secular institutes?*

CONCLUSION

The forthcoming general assembly of the Synod of Bishops will aim to contribute towards the arousal and growth in the universal Church of lay-people, both as individuals and associated, having the apostolic qualities described by John Paul II: "That your assemblies may be as up to now—and ever better—forming Christians with the vocation to sanctity, steadfast in their faith, sure of the doctrine taught by the authentic Magisterium, firm and active in the Church, cemented together by a deep spiritual life, nourished by frequent participation of the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist, persevering in evangelical witness and action, consistent and valid in their respective temporal commitments, constant promoters of peace and justice in the face of all violence and oppression, agile in the critical discernment of situations and ideologies in the light of the social teaching of the Church, confident in the hope of the Lord".⁴¹

⁴¹ Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Allocutio ad legatos consociationum catholicarum Mexicanarum*, die 29 Ianuarii 1979: AAS LXXI (1979), p. 216.

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